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Left Field

Red Pawn: The Story of Noel Field

by Flora Lewis.

Doubleday, 283 pp., \$4.95

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

Noel Field was born in London in 1904. His father, a biologist and a Quaker, was American and his mother English. They moved to Zurich, and young Field grew up in Switzerland. He came to the United States at the age of eighteen after the First World War, went to Harvard and joined the Foreign Service in the Coolidge administration. He brought with him a naive and romantic idealism which the Depression and the rise of fascism set in a Communist mold. By the mid-Thirties his zeal attracted the attention of the Soviet in-

telligence apparatus. Field wanted to help the cause but had scruples about spying against his own government when he was on its payroll. He finally solved the ethical issue by leaving the State Department and joining the League of Nations secretariat. As Miss Lewis remarks, Field evidently thought that "as an international civil servant he would not have anyone to betray."

In Europe, the Communist professionals do not seem to have taken Field seriously or to have made significant use of him, though he kept signaling that he wanted to do more. When the war began, he left the League and caught on with the Unitarian Service Committee, where he performed useful and courageous services for anti-Nazi (if especially Communist) refugees. Then Allen Dulles, chief of the Office of Strategic Services in Switzerland, decided to utilize Field's contacts and

knowledge for intelligence purposes. After the war, Field continued his work for the Unitarian Service Committee until the Boston elders finally tumbled to his pro-Communist operations and fired him. Field went on to Czechoslovakia, hoping to find an appropriate reward for his years of devotion.

He came at just the time when Stalin, in some last mad spasm of power, was beginning a campaign to destroy "unreliable elements" within the Communist party. Any Communist who had fought in Spain, spent the Second World War in Europe, or was otherwise contaminated by the West was suspect. Obviously no one could be more suspect than a man who had worked for Allen Dulles. I imagine that, in the super-McCarthyite mood of Moscow, a few Communists may even have persuaded themselves that Field actually was a master spy, though the leaders

must have known better, or they would have shot him out of hand. Instead, they arrested him and later his wife, his brother, and his foster-daughter, as each began a search for him, and sent them all separately away for quite terrible years of confinement. And they used association with Noel Field, even association with the Unitarian Service Committee, as evidence of guilt in the purge trials of the time.

Field's simple-mindedness was indestructible. He wrote in prison, "My accusers essentially have the same convictions that I do, they hate the same things and the same people I hate—the conscious enemies of socialism, the fascists, the renegades, the traitors. Given their belief in my guilt, I cannot blame them, I cannot but approve their detestation. That is the real horror of it all." It certainly was. After the death of Stalin, the madness somewhat abated.

In the end all the Fields were released. For the Noel Fields this vindicated their confidence in Communism: "fundamentally we shall find our convictions justified, strengthened, in-challengeable." Today they are living in Budapest, apparently serene in their devotion to the new order. Field's brother and foster-daughter drew less benign conclusions about Communist justice.

It is an interesting story; and, if it had obscure passages, it has many fewer now. Miss Lewis deserves great credit for the diligence with which she has pursued the trail of the Fields across Europe and America and for the skill with which she has woven so many threads into a convincing general narrative. She misses one fascinating point—that Field's father, Dr. Herbert Haviland Field, was part of Allen Dulles's intelligence operation in Switzerland in the First World War, which was one reason why Dulles, who greatly respected the father, was interested in using the son twenty-five years later.

Moreover, I think that Miss Lewis gives a wrong impression about the re-

lationship of OSS and the Communists, et. As for Dulles, his main contribution to sending anti-Nazi Germans back where the Communists had hoodwinked to Germany was the Crown Jewels of the Americans and used OSS money for eration, which involved the conservation of their own ends" and suggests that the and return of non-Communist anti-OSS helped "to re-establish the Corn-Nazis, some of whom have played an important role in the Federal Republic. There were, of course, occasions when the Communists took in OSS opera-tion to heighten effects through tives, and there were even Communists "lively" journealese and portentous rhetoric. Even the title is cheap. Sentences pose that every time OSS had a relationship with the Communists, the Communists in Switzerland came to look Americans were hoodwinked, or that on Noel as their chief ladle into the OSS was responsible for Communism gift bags of the American Santa Claus." One wishes that Miss Lewis

Red Pawn correctly describes my would stop calling Field so familiarly own opposition to Noel Field's CALPO by his first name; she did not know project—an attempt to provide a West him that well (in fact, she did not

European counterpart for Moscow's Free Germany Committee—though I have no recollection of the trick by which, according to Miss Lewis, OSS/Paris killed the scheme. Still, any intelligence chief in Switzerland who had failed to make use of Field would have been delinquent. The Communists were an important part of the anti-Nazi resistance movements. It was Dulles's job—which he did superbly—to collect intelligence from every source. Miss Lewis refers several times to OSS schools, set up in France by "the OSS in Bern" to train anti-Nazi Germans to go in with the troops and writes, "Through the arrangements Noel had established with Allen Dulles, German Communists in the west made eager use of these facilities." The OSS Labor Division did run such schools and, I fear, trained Communists in them, but OSS in Bern, Dulles, and Noel Field had nothing at all to do with this pro-

jection to sending anti-Nazi Germans back where the Communists had hoodwinked to Germany was the Crown Jewels of the Americans and used OSS money for eration, which involved the conservation of their own ends" and suggests that the and return of non-Communist anti-OSS helped "to re-establish the Corn-Nazis, some of whom have played an important role in the Federal Republic. There were, of course, occasions when the Communists took in OSS opera-tion to heighten effects through tives, and there were even Communists "lively" journealese and portentous rhetoric. Even the title is cheap. Sentences pose that every time OSS had a relationship with the Communists, the Communists in Switzerland came to look Americans were hoodwinked, or that on Noel as their chief ladle into the OSS was responsible for Communism gift bags of the American Santa Claus." One wishes that Miss Lewis

know him at all; he would not receive her when she called on him in Budapest in 1960). And she likes to dress up his story in resounding phrases, calling it, for example, "the pattern of a world in agony and of the bewildering pitfalls for men of good will who try to walk a hopeful road through it all."

Noel Field's was in fact a trivial existence. He did nothing of consequence in the State Department, disliked spying against it, played (as Miss Lewis concedes) a "minor, really negligible part . . . in serious Communist intelligence operations in Switzerland" and sought nothing more than a life of pious devotion on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Then Stalin for his own reasons transformed him into the all-corrupting American agent (though Miss Lewis agrees that "none of the Fields was vital at any point" in Stalin's campaign against the national Communists), and now Miss Lewis sees this poor, old, befuddled, obtuse man as the pattern of a world in agony.

The twentieth century has had more than its share of mediocre lives charged with false significance first by accidents and then by writers. I fear that there is less to the story of Noel Field than meets the eye. When I talked to him in Paris in 1945 what struck me most was his self-righteous stupidity. Miss Lewis catches part of it in one of her better phrases—the "arrogance of humility." He was a Quaker Communist, filled with smugness and sacrifice. I wish Miss Lewis had contented herself with putting his story together, which she does so well, and had not tried to instruct the reader in its higher significance. □